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The Church Music Question

By

J. Spencer Curran

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J. Spencer Curwen
THE CHURCH MUSIC QUESTION.

CATHOLIC PRESBYTERIAN, March, 1883.]



THE CHURCH MUSIC QUESTION.*

IT is a strong proof of the vitality of religious feeling in the Presbyterian Church that so keen a contest rages over the forms and methods of worship. If the champions of use and wont were content with a feeble and passive protest against innovations ; if the younger and reforming spirits were satisfied to hint at reforms which they had not zeal enough to carry through, then we might indeed say that religion was in a bad way. Life, though it brings conflict sometimes, is better than deadness, and universal agreement in details is a thing not at all to be desired.

What is, however, most earnestly to be desired is that we should approach this question of worship-music in a large and devout spirit, scorning littlenesses and repartee, striving to rise to high ground, and to discover the ultimate principles on which the application of music to worship rests.

It has been said, for example, that Presbyterians ought to make their services more artistic and musical, because the young people in the towns are going off to the Episcopal churches, where they can get these things. This seems to me a very poor argument. If, as I believe, it is right that we should freely admit art in so far as it serves the ends of worship, then let us advocate its introduction upon the distinct basis of principle, and not because we fear a stampede.

Again, I have read that organs ought to be allowed in churches because David played the harp ; and I have seen especial stress laid upon the fact that one of the earliest Scottish psalters has on its title-page a picture of the Psalmist outraging Presbyterian tradition by giving the Psalms with instrumental accompaniment. All this seems to me mere trifling. If organs are lawful and expedient, it is not because their counterparts were used in the Temple, but because they help to kindle heart and voice in God's praise. If they are unlawful and inexpedient, it is not because Presbyterian tradition is against them, but because they are not found to aid our worship.

What is the real apology and justification for the use of music in worship ? This brings us face to face with the two great divergent theories of worship—the Ritual and the Puritan. The Ritual appeals to the senses, the Puritan to the soul. In the one you have the *sight* of a gorgeous building, and an altar blazing with light ; the *sound* of bewitching music ; the *smell* of incense ; the *touch* of holy water ; the *taste* of the wafer. In the other, in its purest form, you have the senses completely ignored, the forms of worship, such as they are, appealing straight to the intellect and the soul. The Ritualist treats

* [The author of this paper touches here and there debateable ground ; but we are sure all our readers will be glad to know the views of one who has given so much attention to the subject, and whose authority is so high. As usual, we are ready to receive remarks on the whole subject, or on any part of it.—ED.]

man as if he were an animal ; the Puritan treats him as if he were an angel. Unfortunately for the theories of each, man is neither : he is a mixture of both. The fact that we cannot escape the influence of the senses ought to be accepted frankly by the Puritan ; while the Ritualist ought to recognise the debasing effect of the sensual method. The movement in the Puritan churches, both in Scotland and England, during the last thirty years, has led to the discovery that the senses must at least be conciliated if the soul is to be free for higher flights.

The ultimate principle on which the use of music in worship rests seems therefore to me to be in the highest sense Utilitarian. Does it quicken and deepen religious feeling, and aid in its expression ? That is the question. It is right that our esthetic sense should be satisfied ; but this is not enough. Nay, if any style of music, vocal or instrumental, tends to lull us into the passive enjoyment of sweet sounds, it is dangerous to worship. Music must help worship, and indeed can help it, but music must never be a substitute for worship.

So much by way of clearing the ground. What, at present, is the Church music question in the Presbyterian Church ?

That the singing should be congregational is universally conceded. Wherever I speak on this subject, in England or elsewhere, among Churchmen or Nonconformists, I find a hearty and even enthusiastic assent to my assertion that in Divine worship the people ought to sing themselves. The rise of musical taste, and the cheapening of good concerts, will tend to emphasise rather than to weaken the desire of the congregations for plain, rich, and general common praise in Divine service. We do not want on Sunday in God's house a feeble attempt to compete with the concert-rooms where we have been in the week. Congregational singing has a charm which is quite distinct from that of artistic music, and does not conflict with it in the least. It is like the sound of many waters, the hum that rises from a busy town, the strange murmur of the forest—perhaps but half musical, in the strict sense of the word, yet touching our hearts with a feeling that we cannot express but cannot resist.

We talk of attracting people to church by musical performances, but in my experience there is nothing so attractive as really good congregational singing. People, I believe, would rather sing themselves than be sung to.

Unfortunately, congregational singing is difficult to get, and almost as difficult to keep when you have got it. The elements of which it is built are perpetually decaying, and must be constantly renewed. The end is, however, worth the trouble. Who has not felt his spirit thrilled and melted by a psalm or hymn sung from the heart by a great congregation ? Who has not felt his spirit checked and chilled when, after an inspiring sermon, the praise has fallen flat and coldly upon his ears ? Why is not the latent power of song that exists in every company of worshippers more strongly realised ? If we could but feel what a devo-

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tional force lies idle or is imperfectly developed in our congregations, we should spare neither time nor money to awaken it!

The battle of psalms *versus* hymns is pretty well over—in Scotland at least. *What* we shall sing is fairly agreed upon: there remains, however, much diversity of opinion as to *how* we shall sing, and what musical aids to our worship shall be allowed.

First, a word as to prose chanting. I say nothing about singing a hymn to a chant, which is a favourite practice in Scotland, because this is not chanting at all. Chanting is unmetrical, and herein lies the difficulty.

Why did the Reformers, who were so anxious to popularise the Bible, abolish chanting? Surely, one would think, the combined recitation of the very words of Scripture would have been their favourite exercise in public worship. Yet they sacrificed this, and put the Psalms into diluted verse. The reasons were probably two. *First*, the chanting of the Romish Church before the Reformation was no doubt irreverent in the extreme, and it was easier to suppress it than to reform it. *Second*, the Reformers had felt the power of song, and *song implies metre*. The Reformers knew what they were doing. Just as the Bible was translated into English that the people might *understand* it, so the Psalms were put into verse that the people might *sing* them. Properly speaking, chanting is not singing; it is musical elocution. Regular rhythmical pulsation, which helps a congregation to keep together in hymn-tune or anthem, is wanting in the chant. Chanting, therefore, must always be more difficult than singing, and if it is really desired that the congregation, and not the choir only, shall join in the exercise, only a few psalms or other Scripture passages and only a few chants must be used, so that the people may know the words and the pointing by heart. Good congregational chanting is seldom or never to be heard. Choirs chant, but not often the people themselves. Moreover, nearly all the choir-chanting we hear is a disgraceful helter-skelter. These undoubted facts are enough to make us pause in adopting the practice of prose chanting. It is a thing delightful in theory, but far from delightful in practice.

Next, as to the question of choir and congregation. The growth and the improvement of church choirs is the most striking feature of the last thirty years in the history of psalmody. Mr. W. H. Monk, the editor of "Hymns, Ancient and Modern," once made this remark to me in conversation: "The better the choir-singing in any church, the worse will be the congregational singing." I was at first disposed to dispute this assertion, but reflection and observation have convinced me, very unwillingly, of its truth.

One is reluctant to say a word that might damp the unselfish devotion of so many organists, choir-masters, precentors, and choir members. How much taste, skill, and time is spent in preparing choirs for the psalms, hymns, tunes, and anthems of Divine service! This

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earnestness is the very life and hope of psalmody, if only it can be so manipulated as to *promote* the singing of the congregation and not to *supersede* it. We all feel the importance of training a choir well—expression to enforce the words, pronunciation to let them be heard, voice culture to secure a smooth and blended effect, so that we may give our best to God. Yet what is the common result of securing these excellences in a choir? The common result is that the people cease to sing. I myself, when I am in a church where there is a fine choir, feel my voice arrested. Others are silent round me, and it seems profane to disturb the balance of voice, and the part-song-like finish of the music. I stand and listen, or am content with a gentle hum that satisfies my conscience without disturbing my neighbours.

This is all very undesirable, and it is an undoubted fact that the musical revival of to-day has often taken a wrong direction, a direction that is injurious to congregational singing. We do not want in our services a Sunday concert. We want a full and general chorus from the congregation. Can we so use choirs as to help us to get this? May they be so organised as to stir the congregation, and not to lull it to sleep?

I regard a choir as indispensable. The ideal of the advocate of congregational singing is, of course, that the congregation should be the choir. But even in churches which approach most nearly to this ideal, the singing must always be led by an earnest musical minority who need rehearsing, and this is still the virtual choir. The question of where this earnest minority is to sit during service is a separate and very important one. I know one church in England where the choir is entirely dispersed among the congregation, and where, as a consequence, the sound of four-part harmony comes from every side in a way that is most inspiring and contagious. Directly you begin to concentrate the best singers at one end of the church, the congregation begin to shift their responsibility. Few churches I suppose will adopt such a radical plan as dispersing the *whole* of the choir among the congregation. If this cannot be done, then let the *majority* of the choir be dispersed, and the larger the majority the better will be the singing. A choir, using the word in this larger sense, is the very life of congregational singing. And the life of the choir is the elementary music class. This is as important as fresh fuel to a steam-engine, and no church should be without one.

If people will not have a dispersed choir, but prefer the ordinary plan of a well-drilled musical body distinct from the congregation, then how can such a body be used so as least to hinder the congregational voice? The best way, I think, is to have one piece in each service sung by the choir alone, the congregation devoutly listening. This will satisfy the musical ambition of the choir, and we may then demand that the rest of the service music shall be thoroughly plain and congregational. This separation of the service music into two kinds is carried out in

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America. It gives the choir work to do, and keeps them together. I do not recommend it, except as an escape from a greater evil, a sort of safety valve which will preserve the congregational singing from entire destruction.

I am very glad that precentors are coming down from their pulpits and turning themselves into choir-masters. They can do much better work in that way for congregational singing. The sound of a tenor voice prominently singing the air an octave below pitch is not to my taste, and if the choir be trained to lead it is not necessary. Increased attention is being paid to the mating of tune and hymn; the utterance of religious sentiment through musical expression is being more studied; and pronunciation is being attended to. These reforms have come none too quickly, for congregations advance rapidly in musical taste. Let us remember that culture in music, divorced from the devotional spirit, is not only a mockery but a failure. Expression can only be musically true and satisfying, if it is inspired by and naturally springs out of the thoughts that are being uttered. Let our psalmody leaders try to feel deeply if they would rise to a higher musical level.

The church music question of greatest magnitude at the present day relates to the organ. At the very mention of the word the mildest reader becomes a partisan, so that a dispassionate study of the *pros* and *cons* of the matter is exceedingly difficult. The opponents of organs have entrenched themselves in a citadel, and they seem to be of opinion that if their citadel falls, the whole order of Presbyterian worship falls too. Meanwhile, the besiegers—armed, I suppose, with organ pipes instead of trumpets—are doing their best to bring down the walls. The capitulation is only a question of time.

Yet, though we may smile at the heat and exaggeration which this controversy excites, there can be no doubt that the change from unaccompanied to accompanied singing is a serious and considerable one, involving great possibilities of harm to what we all so earnestly desire—congregational singing. Let us discuss the matter on practical grounds, setting aside arguments about lawfulness which even religious men feel to be out of harmony with the spirit of the times.

What is the effect of an organ upon congregational singing? I think it makes the act of singing easier, especially if you are trying to sing a part. The notes you want are in the atmosphere. Even though the instrument be so softly played as not to be heard, it is *felt* in the support it gives to the voices. I do not think it can be said to prevent flattening. Most of us have had painful experience that a congregation will flatten in spite of an organ, and will go on, verse after verse, at its own flat pitch against the instrument in a way that tortures the ear. Flattening is not so frequent with an organ as without, but the organ does not cure the evil.

It is this function of bearing up the voices that an organ should perform. It should never attempt to lead. Many people seem to be

of opinion that if an organ is introduced to a church the singing will at once improve, and need never trouble them again. What folly! As well might they expect to increase the piety of a congregation by building a tall steeple. Just as much pains must be taken with the vocal praise with an organ as without. There must be choir-practices and elementary singing-classes and never-ceasing work if a full and harmonious offering of praise is to be maintained.

So far we have spoken of organs as they *should be* used. But how are they commonly used in England, where they are universal and long established? They are often played so loudly that the choir and congregation chirp like birds in a thunderstorm. Moreover, the organ is a very noble instrument, which engrosses all the energies and sympathies of the player. The organist, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, is the choir-master, and does whatever other musical work is done in the congregation. He is absorbed in his instrument, and, in consequence, choir training is neglected, and congregational training never thought of. Singing becomes shouting, the words are drowned in a muddy sea of organ tone, and the general result is noise, not music.

The organ is a good servant, but a bad master, and the temper of many of the intelligent opponents of organs is this—Let us bear the ills we have rather than fly to others that we know not of. I can assure you that the example of what has happened in England is enough to make me feel much sympathy with this position.*

One word to the opponents of organs. A mere negative attitude is not enough. You must have a positive policy, and show people that you can produce an unaccompanied service which satisfies the ear and the devotional feeling richly and deeply, falling like the echoes of a purer worship upon the weary and distracted spirit.

The work necessary to create and sustain a service of this kind is far greater than for one which is accompanied. But it is work in aid of devotion, and if your opposition to organs springs really from your zeal for purity of worship, here is your opportunity of proving it.

There are three chief forces that go to make or mar the service of praise—minister, people, and precentor. The ministers have frequent opportunity of expressing their views on psalmody; the opinions of the congregation are echoed in the newspapers and in general conversation; but the precentors have but few opportunities of making themselves heard. Yet they have a practical acquaintance with the subject which no others have; they are at the front as workers; they know only too well how the ideal differs from the real, and what struggles and disappointments beset the path of the psalmody worker. I enjoy the friendship of many Presbyterian precentors, and I have thought that it would make this paper practical and straight-hitting if I could persuade some of them to contribute their opinions as to the hindrances they meet.

* For a fuller discussion of the Organ question, see "Studies in Worship Music," by J. Spencer Curwen.

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I have succeeded well, and shall give you some passages from the letters that have come in answer to my appeal.

A precentor of an important church in a Scottish city writes :—

“First as to ministers. For nearly thirteen years I have been leader of psalmody in this church. During five of these years we had *two* ministers ; during the rest of the time, one. We have a meeting for the practice of psalmody every Friday evening (holidays excepted), besides an elementary class every year, and extra meetings before our annual recital or concert. In all these years we have only been visited twice by a minister at our ordinary meetings. My last elementary class met at seven o'clock on Fridays, an hour fixed to suit young people attending school. Our minister in announcing the class, spoke of the benefits to be derived, and urged parents to send their children. He has a family of young people himself, but not one of them ever appeared. Nearly every Sunday, prayer is offered up for preachers, Sabbath-school teachers, tract distributors, sessions, and Christian workers. Though I have been a precentor for over twenty-five years altogether, I have only twice heard the precentor prayed for. From their practice, I have been forced to the conclusion that most ministers regard psalmody as something that may be used or left out as occasion requires. If the sermon is short, we are sure to have a lot of singing ; if it is protracted, the last psalm or hymn is shortened or left out. The duty of sending a list of the Sunday's psalms and hymns to the weekly practice is also frequently neglected. Of late we have often been called to sing tunes at first sight in church.”

After noticing that elders and managers keep aloof from the association, my friend mentions that his Psalmody Association has seldom numbered less than 100 members, though with a congregation of 1200 members, besides adherents, he does not think this a fair proportion. He proceeds :—

“With such an example from those in authority, it is hardly to be expected that the congregation as a whole will be much interested in psalmody. Few congregations, I believe, could muster a greater number of sight-singers than we, and yet I am sorry to say the congregational voice is neither so strong nor so hearty as it once was, and should be. The fashion of having an organ and choir to ‘do’ the singing seems to be killing all sense of responsibility in this matter. How else can we account for so many whom we know to be capable, standing listless and idle during praise?

“The introduction of so many new tunes has also injured congregational interest very much. During 1882 I conducted the psalmody at 99 regular church services, and in these 133 tunes and 18 pieces (or sentences) were made use of—too many for any congregation to keep in full song. The manner in which our hymn book is got up—every tune having its own hymn—compels the use of a great many tunes. The style of tune now generally advocated is another hindrance. Most of them are so bold, so void of melody, so wooden that it is little wonder that people don't take to them readily.

“Professor Macfarren says that ‘all lightness, all grace, all freedom in melody, result from a judicious use of passing notes ;’ but passing notes have been tabooed by the editors of our collections of tunes. The alteration of harmonies has also hindered us considerably. When an old and standard tune like ‘St. Paul's’ or ‘Martyrdom’ is sung with new harmony, the effect is like the twenty pipers playing each his favourite tune at the same time and in the same room, for the elder people sing the old harmonies, and the younger ones the new.”

Another precentor, who confesses that he is suffering from an attack of melancholy, writes :—

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"If managers, deacons, and elders of churches were to expend upon choirs what they seem happy to lay out upon organs, what an overwhelming change would there be in the service of praise in the house of the Lord! Is it not a fact that such perishable things as preaching and praying seem, in a large number of Scotch churches, to be considered *the worship of God*; whilst the praise of God, which is everlasting, which is the connecting link between time and eternity, is left out in the cold—miserably perishing for lack of sustenance."

A third precentor writes :—

"In choosing organists and conductors of psalmody, too little attention is paid, in my opinion, to teaching power. The question of teaching is, indeed, rarely mentioned. I think that playing or singing should be a secondary matter to the power to teach and to attract young people."

Here we have a new hindrance brought forward by a fourth precentor :—

"The chief thing that I have to complain of is the pride of some of our people in Scotland. A great many people, in country districts especially, if they occupy a social position a very little above the working classes, think themselves much superior, and will not associate with them. You have no idea what a hindrance this is to the improvement of psalmody in Scotland. Surely we should all be in the same spirit of humbleness when we meet in church to worship the same God!"

Speaking of a tune-book recently issued by the section of the Presbyterian Church to which he belongs, the same writer says :—

"I do not care for the arrangements. In a great number of the tunes the basses are far too low to be effective, and dissonances and double dissonances are too frequently used for congregational singing. In the whole, the work of the organist is more apparent than that of the choir-master. I think it is also a mistake to set a tune to each hymn in all cases. There are a great many of the tunes, set to good hymns, which will never be sung, for the reason that they are not worth the singing. Why not have the leaves of the hymnal cut, so that the choice of tune may be free?"

A fifth precentor writes :—

"Some of the ministers are very careless in the selection of hymns. It is not unusual for ministers who come to our church to preach to leave the precentor to choose the hymns, saying, 'Take any you like.' When this is said to me, I venture to ask the subject of the discourse, so that there may be some unity in the service. Many of the Psalms I regard as unfit for singing. Our service of praise would be improved if only Psalms of praise, of penitence, or such as contain some expression of feeling, were used in singing. It is the habit of our minister to begin at the first Psalm and go straight on in regular order, no matter what the text may be. Thus we sometimes get a mournful sermon and a joyful Psalm, and *vice versa*.

"As to the congregation, I find they will not respond to the invitations given from week to week to attend a psalmody class. If anything is to be done, it must be with junior classes. I have great faith in training the young, but find it difficult to make the work such as will draw them. If a few pounds were spent every year on prizes for regular attendance and for sight-singing, it would bring them out. Kirk-sessions, however, don't care to spend much money on the musical training of the congregation. They think they have discharged their duty when they have paid the precentor's salary. I myself gave prizes one winter, consisting of the Psalms, hymns, and tune-book which we use; but I could not afford to continue them."

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In opposition to what I have read about new tune books, a sixth precentor says :—

“I find that a large book with plenty of variety and good tunes is a great help to sustaining of interest in the psalmody. The choir sings with more life and feeling, and this in turn is caught by the congregation.”

My last correspondent writes with much energy and freshness. He says :—

“A much greater interest is now taken by ministers in the service of praise than formerly, and it is a common thing to find them visiting the practice meetings and giving a word of encouragement. This has a greater effect in stimulating the young than some are aware of.

“Less progress has, I think, been made by sessions than by ministers in recognising the importance of good congregational singing. Instead of encouraging their precentors and choirs, they seem to think that one of their special duties is to keep a watchful eye over them, and to miss no opportunity of putting their foot upon them. This, I believe, along with the natural youthful unreasonableness of choirs, is one fruitful source of what are termed choir ‘rows.’

“For example, some matter of detail has to be arranged about choir seats, change of practising night, a soiree, or some other minor affair. The matter is referred to at a meeting of session, and after conversation the clerk is requested to drop the precentor a note, asking him to do so and so. The clerk then writes a letter, using the most irritating phraseology which accident or design could have suggested to him. The precentor feels the edge of the censorial knife, and at the next meeting of the choir reads the letter with a tone of injured innocence. This letter is hardly finished when several members are on their feet, bursting with eloquence, and in the space of five minutes the explosive powers of the choir are fully developed. A strike is at once agreed upon, but as several members are absent, they must be seen and prevented from going to the choir seats on Sabbath. This necessitates a recapitulation of the affair with ‘interlude’ and ‘episode.’ On Sabbath there is no choir. On Monday the minister calls them together and lectures them. Some eloquent member replies, giving his version, but the story has taken such dimensions, like the snowball that gathers with rolling, that the minister can scarcely recognise it, though he presided at the meeting where it originated. The tangled skein takes a long time to unravel, and some of the knots are so obstinate as to require cutting. The almost invariable result of these affairs is that a torrent of wrath descends on the head of the precentor from all sides, and he is made the scapegoat who has to carry the troubles, or swallow them as he pleases. If members of session would only remember that they themselves were once guilty of the offence of being young, many troubles would be avoided.

“The greatest complaint against congregations is, I believe, apathy. They want stirring up. This can be done in endless ways. Your lectures, for instance, stir up from the centre outward, acting on those to whom you speak. They, in turn, stir up their pupils and the outside world. Ministers interested in the service of praise may in like manner stir up their elders, and the elders the people. Personally I hold a somewhat different theory, and practise it. It may be called stirring up from the outside inward. I try to gain the hearts of the children and young people, believing that they rule the mothers, that the mothers rule the fathers, and the fathers the Church. A plan at present on trial in the church to which I belong is to have occasional joint-meetings of the Psalmody Association, Literary Association, and Bible Class. This really includes all the young of the congregation above Sabbath-school age. The first combined meeting is a lecture on Musical History, with illustrations. This plan will act and react. The Psalmody Association will confer pleasure and profit on the others, and will draw sympathy from them.

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"One complaint against congregations is that they consider precentors their special property, and imagine they have a right to criticise them musically, mentally, socially, &c. A chapter on this might be amusing, but I do not know that it would bear much upon the 'Church Music Question.'

"A few months ago the Psalmody Committee of the General Assembly of our Church issued a circular to ministers containing a number of questions with the object of guiding them in the issue of a new psalter. Our minister asked me to reply in his name, which I did. I also took the liberty of writing to the Committee that a rich mine of musical experience and knowledge was neglected by them when they took no counsel of their precentors. This is a subject on which many able precentors have just cause of complaint.

"The want of uniformity in the tune-books of the Presbyterian Churches is very much to be deplored. I remember when the 'Scottish Psalmody' was used in all the Presbyterian Churches. One edition, the most in use, costing only sixpence, was virtually a pocket-book. Scores of young men carried it in their pockets all the year round, and used it on all kinds of occasions. To do the same thing now, one would have to carry a wallet.

"Finally: let ministers acquaint themselves as thoroughly as possible with the subject. Let church sessions endeavour to look at the subject in a reasonable way, and act kindly and judiciously towards the young. Let members of choirs control their impetuosity when their seniors differ from them. Let precentors leave no stone unturned to make themselves masters of their work, so that they may stand head and shoulders above their classes. And let us all be of one mind in remembering that the work is the Lord's."

I adopt this practical summary as my own, and close this article with a hearty "Amen" to its words.

J. SPENCER CURWEN.

Symposium.

PROGRESS IN THEOLOGY.

No. III.

IN previous articles for this symposium, Principal Tulloch has argued the possibility of progress in theology from the nature of human knowledge, whatever the subject-matter of knowledge may be; and Dr. Hodge admits that theology, in a general sense, as the sum-total of all that at any time may be known of God, is a progressive knowledge; but he affirms that theology, in the narrower sense of the essential Christian doctrines, has already been substantially determined. "Theology, in the sense of the sum of saving doctrines common to the Reformation and modern Evangelical Churches, will not make progress in the future."

The phrase "sum of saving doctrines" indicates a conception of Christianity from which theology might make progress in the future. For this phrase "saving doctrines" is one of several common expres-

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The class referred to, now very numerous, it seems hard to reach. Separated to some extent from their own people, and yet kept at arm's length by Europeans, they are not in a position likely to minister to sweetness of temper. One remark painfully struck us. It was said or hinted that these people were not expected to make their appearance in the English Churches. There are other castes besides those of Hindoos. The Baboos of the smaller towns—where, as well as in the presidential capitals, they are numerous—are very accessible to Christian influence.

3. Another subject was the "Self-support and Self-propagation of the Native Church." Things are greatly more advanced in this respect than many have any notion of. Twenty years ago the Tinnevely Mission was carried on by sixteen European missionaries. Now it has only four Europeans, one of them the bishop, and the other three engaged in educational work. The pastoral work is in the hands of natives, and the native contributions amount to £2500 a-year. "Our Tamil Missions," said a native C. M. pastor, "have made much progress in self-rule and some advance in Church extension. The native council is *bona fide*—the chairman, secretary, and members all being natives." The C. M. S. Santhal converts build their own chapels and pay more than half the stipends of the native clergy. We have seen that the Gossner Mission is largely wrought by native pastors and catechists; they get half their support from the native congregations. "My first mission field," said the Rev. M. Timpany of the Canadian Baptist Mission, "was Nellore. At the end of six years there were between 700 and 800 communicants; and ten village school-house chapels were completed, and twelve more were a-building. The only outside help the people got was from the central church, which gave to each erection a door, a window, and five rupees." "I know," said Mr. Timpany, "that Indian Christians will give out of their poverty." In Ceylon, the American Board of Foreign Missions has thirteen native churches, all but three of them self-supporting. Their 1000 members not merely support their own ministers in a suitable manner, but they contribute £70 a year for native missions. A native Ceylonese having a humble Government appointment, will contribute an annual sum, at the thought of which a broad-acred laird would not long ago have grown pale, and which would have startled even a stiff well-to-do Seceder accustomed to put his hand in his pocket.

We shall briefly allude to the papers on *Woman's Work in the Indian Mission-field*. These—all by ladies—were not the least notable. The Eurasian and Foreign Female Mission agents have increased by more than a fourth, and the Zenana pupils have grown from 2000 to 9000. More remarkable still, a *thousand more* native Christian females are in the Mission-field in 1881 than in 1871. Everything indicates still greater progress in the coming years.

It was said at the close of the Conference that the harvest time in India is near. It may be so. Certainly the progress made is full of encouragement. If it be the case, as is maintained, that Hinduism, instead of tottering to its fall, is actively and successfully propagandist, that may only mean dread of Christianity, or it may be the result of that vitalising influence which Christianity communicates even to its enemies. If 300,000 of the converts are in the south of India, and the great movements are not in the great centres of Brahminism, this may signify that, as of old, it is God's purpose, by the things which are not, to bring to nought the things which are; not that the weak are stronger than the strong, but that the weak are more recipient of the mightiest of all forces which have entered into human history.

J.

Open Council.

CHURCH MUSIC QUESTION.

To the Editor of "The Catholic Presbyterian."

SIR,—In your note on Mr. Curwen's paper, "the Church Music Question," you express a "readiness to receive remarks on any part of the subject."

We do not question Mr. Curwen's high authority, or the importance of most of his statements; but he overlooks the cause of "the contest," among Presbyterians, about "Church music." The contest does not regard the utility of instruments, but their lawfulness. "The ultimate principle" with them is not utilitarian, but Biblical—the question is not so much whether instruments are helpful as whether they are Scriptural in the present dispensation.

The Presbyterian "principle" is that the worship of God should be "pure." It forbids "the approving of any religious worship not instituted by God," though "under the title of antiquity, custom, devotion, good intent, or any other pretence whatsoever." Such being the "principle," the first question must be, is instrumental help in praise "instituted by God"—is it "agreeable to His will" as revealed in His Word?

It is said "organs help to kindle heart and voice in God's praise." Some, however, take a different view. It is said that "even religious men feel the argument about lawfulness to be out of harmony with the spirit of the times." The reply is "the spirit of the times, the spirit of the world, or of the age, is the spirit of the natural mind at enmity with God"—"the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God"—and "because the world by wisdom knew not God." He has given us a revelation of His will resting upon sheer authority. From this there can be no appeal.

The Presbyterians of the second Reformation, Puritans and Covenanters, did not consider "praise-worship" with the same thoroughness of care as they did "the doctrine, discipline, and government" of the Church; and as instrumental music had been abused by Popery and Prelacy, and is not mentioned in connection with New Testament worship, they laid the organ aside altogether.

We long held the traditional view of the non-lawfulness of organs in New Testament worship, and therefore we sympathise with those who still hold it. Many years ago, however, we were led to examine what the Word says on infant Church membership, and the result of our inquiry led to a change of stand-point from which to view "the Church music question."

Our position is that the Church of God is one Church, though having passed through different dispensations; that the Word of God is one book, though in two volumes; and that everything not Levitical or National in the one dispensation is lawful in the other, unless the Word declare that it is abolished.

What time instruments were first used in the worship of God we do not determine. We know that "the harp and organ" were known as instruments of music long before the Flood; though, in the brief sketch by Moses, we do not read that they were then used in leading the praise-worship of God. We read in Job of "the harp and the organ" as instruments of music, but we do not read that they were used by him in praise-worship of God. We do, however, know that instruments were used in leading the praise of God on the wilderness side of the Red Sea, when Moses and the children of Israel "sang a song" of praise "to the Lord;" and "Miriam took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels . . . and answered, sing ye to the Lord for He hath triumphed gloriously." God accepted this worship of His people. It was non-Levitical, being prior to the call of Aaron.

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The praise-worship of those whom Saul met, going up to Bethel, "prophesying"—praising God in song—"with the psaltery, the tabret, the pipe, and the harp," was not connected with the Levitical ceremonial, but was "a service of song" common to all ages of the Church. The psalmody of David was non-Levitical. "The psalteries, harps, and cymbals" were for the service of song in the house of the Lord—not connected with sacrifice, but praise. "They prophesied with the harp"—they praised God in song with the harp. The New Testament says nothing leading us to suppose that instruments are unlawful under the present dispensation; and as the Church is one and the Word one, the silence of the New Testament does not set them aside.

Taking our stand on the principle of the oneness of the Church under all dispensations, and the oneness of the Word, though of many parts, and in two volumes, we can maintain the ordinances of the Sabbath, of degrees for marriage, of infant Church membership, of the tenth of substance for the treasury, of magistracy, and of instrumental help in the praise-worship of God. On no other principle can we *fully* maintain any of these; but holding this principle we can maintain them all and then accept all the instruction that Mr. Curwen gives us on "the Church Music Question."

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SIR,—It was with much satisfaction that I read the paper of Mr. Curwen in your last number. The question has many aspects; but perhaps no more pleasing one could have been chosen than that in which it has been introduced to your readers. The topic to which he has specially addressed himself he terms "the application of music to worship," or more shortly, "worship-music," and beyond this theme he merely "touches" what may be called "debateable ground." It is proper that this should be kept in view, for otherwise there might have been complaint that in the discussion of this great question there should be no reference to Divine revelation, or specially to that worship of which praise is but the expression, and music a mere accident or circumstance.

Taking into consideration, therefore, the low platform from which the question has been approached, Mr. Curwen's paper cannot be regarded otherwise than as interesting and instructive. He states the case as between the Ritualist and the Puritan with so much fairness and geniality, and altogether manifests so much of the impartial musical critic, that, save for an occasional expression of his own belief, it would be difficult to make out to which side his arguments, if not his sympathies, lean. For example, he scouts the idea of retaining the young people of the Presbyterian Church in their communion by making the "services more artistic and musical," without its being shown that "it is right freely to admit art in so far as it serves the ends of worship." And, again, that organs must be considered "lawful and expedient, not because their counterparts were used in the Temple, but because they help to kindle heart and voice in God's praise." Speaking of "the two great divergent theories of worship—the Ritual and the Puritan," he says, "the Ritual appeals to the senses, the Puritan to the soul." And no one at all interested in this discussion could wish for a better description of the rival theories than he gives. "In the one you have the *sight* of a gorgeous building and an altar blazing with light, the *sound* of bewitching music, the *smell* of incense, the *touch* of holy water, the *taste* of the wafer. In the other, in its purest form, you have the senses completely ignored, the forms of worship, such as they are, appealing straight to the intellect and the soul." This utterance of Mr. Curwen is, in my opinion, pre-eminently instructive. It not only describes the two opposite theories, but it depicts the two systems in their practical operation. Undesignedly it may be, but all the more forcibly, he exhibits not the nature only but the tendency of Ritualism, and he would be a prophet indeed who could say *when* the excesses of the one system could be checked and

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kept within bounds were the principle of the other system abandoned. "It needs but a little," says Mr. Spurgeon, "to degrade the Christian into a Ritualist, and still less to turn the Ritualist into a Romanist."

This leads me to speak of principles. Mr. Curwen again and again uses the word, either in the singular or the plural number. He speaks of the desirableness of "striving to discover the ultimate principles on which the application of music to worship rests," of "advocating the introduction of art," in so far as it serves the ends of worship, "upon the distinct basis of principle." And, again, "the ultimate principle on which the use of music in worship rests seems . . . to be in the highest sense utilitarian." On reading this conclusion, we had to remind ourselves of the precise topic which Mr. Curwen undertook to discuss; but, in its wider issues, the question must be discussed with respect primarily to the revealed will of God, in the interpretation of which there ought to be no such thing as a "utilitarian principle." "God," says Calvin, "in vindicating His own right, first proclaims that He is a jealous God, and will be a stern avenger if He is confounded with any false god; and thereafter defines what due worship is, in order that the human race may be kept in obedience." And regarding the necessity for the revelation of God's will, Isaac Taylor remarks—"It is just the relation of the infinite to the finite that must be expected to form the peculiar topics of Divine revelation." The discussion therefore should embrace such points as these—the nature of Divine worship; the parts or divisions of it; the Divine appointment of those parts, and the changes therein sanctioned in the Scriptures; more especially the subject of Divine praise, its nature, the medium of it, and the effect upon that medium consequent on the change of dispensation.

Mr. Curwen has "touched" some of this "higher ground," and I would use the space yet available to me in discussing one or two of the points to which he refers. A large question is opened up by an expression he uses more than once, "the ends of worship." He gives no distinct statement as to what he considers these "ends" to be, but we may gather this, inferentially at least, from some of his expressions. He says, for instance, that the use of instruments may "help to kindle heart and voice in God's praise." Also that music in worship, to be right and useful, "must quicken and deepen religious feeling, and aid in its expression;" further, that "any style of music, vocal or instrumental, which tends to lull us into the passive enjoyment of sweet sounds, is dangerous to worship." "Music," he adds, "must help worship, and indeed can help it, but music must never be a substitute for worship." The same point is touched in a reference he makes to the effect of bad congregational singing. "Who has not felt his spirit checked," doubtless in the "higher flights" of the soul, of which he had previously spoken, "and chilled when, after an inspiring sermon, the praise has fallen flat and coldly upon his ears?" And in another connection he says, "Let us remember that culture in music, divorced from the devotional spirit, is not only a mockery, but a failure."

From all this, an idea may be formed of what Mr. Curwen means by "the ends of worship," presuming that he had chiefly in view that part of it which is called praise. It were well, however, that in discussing the question in hand, there should be no dubiety in this respect. Theologians, I find, in treating of praise, always regard it as a part of prayer; partaking more or less of adoration, confession (in the sense of acknowledging God's dealings both in providence and in grace), and thanksgiving. Reference is made to the Psalms and other Scripture tributes of praise as combining all these elements. This aspect of praise should throw no little light upon the discussion of the present question. If praise be a part of prayer in its wider sense, then whatever may be predicated of the one exercise, in its one phase, may be predicated of the other. We attach to the exercise of prayer, holy awe or reverence, humility, devotion, a consciousness of dealing with Him who is expressly designated the hearer of prayer, and into whose presence we have immediate access through the mediation of Christ, and in praying we are

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taught and helped by the Holy Spirit. It is no begging of the question, therefore, to assert that until praise can be shown to differ essentially from prayer, no greater freedom can be allowed in regard to the exercise of the one duty than of the other. Prayer is a transaction of the soul with God ; so is praise. Prayer must be exercised under the influence of the Holy Spirit ; so ought praise. Prayer is accepted only in and through the Great Mediator, so is praise. As, in prayer, there can be no worshipping of God through the medium of images and pictures ; so in praise, no other medium is admissible than that of "heart and voice."

Mr. Curwen refers again and again to "the influence of the senses," a point intimately connected with that just noticed. Here, too, there is a lack of precision. Speaking of the Ritualist and the Puritan forms of worship, he describes the one as appealing to "the senses," and the other to "the soul." Both forms it seems are defective, but defective only because each is extreme ; for "the senses must at least be conciliated, if the soul is to be set free for higher flights." Of good congregational singing he says, "It is like the sound of many waters, the hum that rises from a busy town, the strange murmur of the forest, perhaps, but half musical, yet touching our hearts with a feeling that we cannot express but cannot resist." There is much more to the same effect—all, or mostly all, of the *subjective* kind. We miss any reference, or have but slight reference, to the *objective* aspect of praise worship. In other words, while we have a good deal said about the senses and the sensuous, we miss any direct allusion to that faith "without which it is impossible to please God." This is surely an oversight, even in discussing the minor point of "music-worship." Some more direct reference might have been made to this indispensable accompaniment of all acceptable worship—faith. Now, with our apprehension of what faith in such a connection is, we cannot conceive how the soul can be "set free for higher flights"—which we take to mean for communion with God, the great object of all true worship—"by the senses being conciliated." This result we believe to be produced by the exercise of faith ; but here it is ascribed to the effect of music operating upon the senses—faith giving place to sense instead of triumphing over it. The music that effects this important result must be of the instrumental kind ; for we are told that "the discovery" has been made "during the last thirty years." In contrast to this teaching, let us listen to the testimony of the Puritan Owen. "It is admitted that the exercise of saving faith—of that faith which is the fruit of the Spirit, and produces regeneration—is attended by feelings appropriate to its object ; but this is to be referred to the nature of the object. If we believe a good report, the effect is joy ; the perception of beauty produces delight,—of moral excellence, a glow of approbation ; of spiritual things, in many cases a joy unspeakable and full of glory." It seems to have been John Owen's opinion that it is the exercise of faith that sets "the soul free for higher flights." But he did not ignore the senses. In another place he says, "the truths of revelation, though not the ground of our faith, do powerfully and rightly affect our feelings." We had marked off for quotation some passages in Canon Liddon's *Elements of Religion*, in which the relations of faith to feeling, and generally the emotional in religion, are discussed ; but we can only refer to the volume.

Another point touched by Mr. Curwen, and which more immediately concerns his special topic, is that of "freely admitting art" into public worship ; or, as he otherwise puts it, "satisfying our æsthetic sense." This we take to refer to the highest development of vocal music by the aid of instrumental accompaniments. Addressing the opponents of organs in churches, he says, "A negative attitude is not enough. You must have a positive policy, and show people that you can produce an unaccompanied service which satisfies the ear and the devotional feeling richly and deeply, fall'ing like the echoes of a purer worship upon the weary and distracted spirit." This is the well-expressed utterance of a musical critic, but certainly the criticism of music apart from worship ; and it induces the query, if it is not a mistake and a misnomer to speak thus of worship-music ? In so far as Divine worship is concerned, the exercise referred to is praise—a word

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which Mr. Curwen seldom uses, always preferring that of "music." Now, it need scarcely be remarked that the terms are by no means synonymous. Praise, like prayer, may be "uttered or unexpressed," and, in the light of revelation, we may conclude that music, apart from the heart-worship, cannot be acceptable to God, however artistically offered. And this brings us face to face with the question as to whether the high ideal in church music set before us here is practically attainable; and if attainable, is it desirable? It may be taken for granted, that upon every Christian congregation rests the obligation to praise the Lord "skilfully." But considering the component and ever-varying parts of an ordinary congregation—consisting of young and old, cultured and uncultured, those who are joyful and others who are sad—can more be expected than that an honest and persistent effort be made to harmonise generally, voices and expressed emotions so varied? This, we think, is all that in the light of revelation seems to be obligatory. Not only so, but we think that the introduction of so-called "art" in public worship is not only unwarranted by Scripture, but likely, so far from aiding devotion, seriously to interfere with it. "The worship of God," says Owen, "is, or ought to be, the same at all times, in all places and amongst all people, in all nations; and the order of it is fixed and determined in all particulars that belong to it." He adds, "And let not man pretend the contrary until he can give an instance of any such defect in the institutions of Christ, as that the worship of God cannot be carried on without an addition of something of their own for the supply thereof."

Mr. Curwen's taste, however, is discriminating, and he gives us clearly to understand that the improvement of congregational singing is what he mainly seeks. His testimony to the very general desire for vocal praise throughout the country is of great importance. "That the singing should be congregational," he says, "is universally conceded. Wherever I speak on this subject, in England or elsewhere, among Churchmen or Nonconformists, I find a hearty and even enthusiastic assent to my assertion that in Divine worship the people ought themselves to sing." Choirs and organs he considers but as means to an end; that end being the best possible congregational singing. Good congregational singing he regards as far more likely to attract people to church than "musical performances." But it seems congregational singing is "difficult to get, and almost as difficult to keep when got," and so far from the organ necessarily improving the singing, he owns that it has often the opposite effect, and that the opposition of many to the introduction of the organ is quite reasonable, as they would rather bear the ills they have than fly to others that they know not of! This is a frank and valuable testimony. Mr. Curwen permits us to look behind the scenes, and we acknowledge to have got from him a clearer idea than we had before, of the immense labour required in order that "a full and harmonious offering of praise be maintained."

The effect of Mr. Curwen's paper upon my own mind has been to confirm my preference for unaided, that is unaccompanied, congregational singing. I could not but appreciate his keen and intelligent interest in the subject he discusses, and my sympathies go with him in a desire for increased and sustained improvement in the singing. But I stop far short of his ideal of excellence. As I have said, I believe it to be neither desirable nor attainable; and not desirable because of the injurious influence it would have on congregational devotion. Had he given more prominence to the theology of the question, I am convinced he would have done more justice to it. There are some who would make us believe that "the Church music question" is beyond discussion—that it is foreclosed. Mr. Curwen has come too much into contact with church life to share this conceit. He writes as one who knows that it is still a living, and with very many, a most important question, though, as we have seen, he regards the discussion not so much as it affects "worship-praise" as "worship-music."

M. S. TAIT.



